

Messi, Guardiola meet again

AGENCIES

On a night when Shakhtar Donetsk host Inter, Liverpool travel to Porto, Real Madrid welcome FC Sheriff and AC Milan play Atletico Madrid, the focus will still be on the game between Paris Saint-Germain and Manchester City at the Parc des Princes as PSG's Lionel Messi reunites with City coach Pep Guardiola.

There was a time when a reunion between Messi and Guardiola looked distinctly possible, but on Tuesday they will be on opposite sides.

However, PSG are yet to reveal whether the six-time Ballon d'Or winner will form part of their plans for a heavyweight continental clash, but Messi has been pictured in full training.

As it turns out, things could have been very different if certain series of events took place a bit differently.

City announced the £100 million (\$139m) signing of Grealish from Aston Villa on August 5, the same day Barcelona revealed Messi would not be staying at the Camp Nou.

A year ago, when Messi tried to force his departure from Catalonia, City appeared the most likely destination.

In the end Barcelona prevented the



six-time Ballon d'Or winner from leaving then and 12 months later, Messi was prepared to stay put until it became clear the financial mess at the Camp Nou meant he could not.

If City had anticipated Messi becoming available, they might have moved for him. But instead they focused their sights on Grealish and were trying to sign Harry Kane, a move that ultimately didn't happen.

Meanwhile, certain members of the City squad may be hoping that Messi loses his race to be fit enough for Champions League duty on Tuesday, but Ruben Dias is not one of them as the Portuguese defender is desperate to test himself against the best.

Messi has been nursing a knee problem of late, but Dias is hoping to see the Argentine shake off that ailment and line up alongside fellow superstar forwards Neymar and Kylian Mbappe when the Premier League title holders pay a visit to the French capital.

"Whether it's Messi, Mbappe, Neymar or [Mauro] Icardi, PSG have amazing strength in depth and no matter who it is we face, it'll be a tough test. Everyone is looking forward to this game for exactly that reason," Dias said ahead of the game.

"Messi is a phenomenal player and as a professional, you want to play against all those sorts of names," Dias added.

Messi has played just three games for his new club and is yet to score. He has sat out PSG's last two matches with a knee problem but the feeling is that Mauricio Pochettino has been saving him for City.

After being held 1-1 by Club Brugge in their opening game, PSG need a positive result against City to stop their rivals taking control of their Champions League group.



PHOTO: FEROZ AHMED

'The confidence is very, very high'

SPORTS REPORTER



Captain Jamal Bhuiyan believes Bangladesh can pull off something special in the upcoming SAFF Championship as the national football team depart for Maldives this afternoon to take part in the regional football extravaganza, starting from October 1 at the National Football Stadium in Male.

"I think we are strong and confident as a group from playing together for so long," said Jamal Bhuiyan at a press conference arranged to address the preparation of the men in Red and Green ahead of the 13th edition of the regional tournament yesterday.

"We've been working hard in the last few practice sessions to perform our best in the tournament. Of course, our goal is to reach the final and become champions but we've to take one match at a time," said Jamal, who also led his side in the last edition of the SAFF tournament where Bangladesh were ousted from the group stage due to goal difference despite having equal six points with Pakistan and Nepal.

Ahead of the SAFF Championship, Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) released the long-serving British coach Jamie Day and appointed Bashundhara Kings' Spanish coach Oscar Bruzon as the interim coach, who also stated the objective of playing the final by displaying an entertaining and attacking brand of football, in contrast to his predecessor.

"We're working to show that we are playing and understanding the new set of principles of attack and defense of the team while working on the set-pieces. The most important thing is that the players and coaches have good understanding to make things happen."

"I can't promise the results or the trophy,

but I can assure you that the boys have already started implementing new ideas. We want Bangladesh football to progress to greater heights and for that, we need to prove that we can beat all teams of the subcontinent region," said the 44-year-old coach.

Jamal and his teammates only had four days training under Bruzon and are due for two more sessions ahead of the first match against Sri Lanka.

"On day one, the coach had let us know what style he wants to play. What formation he wants to implement is familiar with most players at the club level, so I think we'll adapt easily before the first game against Sri Lanka," Jamal expressed his optimism.

Bruzon echoed Jamal's optimism and seemed pleased with the progress of his charges so far. "The confidence of everybody is very, very high. The group, focused on the process, is getting clear ideas with each daily practice and convinced that we can click this time," said the Spaniard, further adding that they are now only focused on the crucial opening match.

"Right now, all analysis is revolving around Sri Lanka. If we can beat them, then we're going to play a half-final against India in the next match. Otherwise, we're going to face difficulty in getting points because the next rivals are tougher."

"The road to the final is going to be a very long one because four games are a lot of games indeed. But winning the first game will greatly amplify our chances," concluded Bruzon, who also has experience of working with the clubs at Maldives and India.

Bruzon has declared the final 23-man squad, reduced from 27, in which Bangladesh left out Manik Mollah, Atikuzzaman, Mehedi Hasan and Elea Kingsley, who is yet to receive clearance from Asian Football Confederation.



PHOTO: TWITTER

BCB awaits ICC's instructions on WC protocols

SPORTS REPORTER



All participating boards, including the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB), are expected to receive a clear guideline regarding the health security measures for the upcoming World Cup from ICC.

"In the next few days, all the boards are expected to get specific instructions regarding health safety protocols, traveling guidelines and quarantine protocols for the upcoming T20 World Cup to be held in Oman and the UAE," informed BCB's chief physician Debashish Chowdhury told the media yesterday.

Bangladesh are all set to travel to Oman on October 3 to take part in a

preparation camp for the upcoming ICC T20 World Cup. The cricketers will undergo coronavirus tests on October 2 and will remain in a strict home quarantine before leaving for Muscat.

The Tigers will also spend a day in room quarantine in Muscat before starting their training.

"Members of the world cup squad will undergo coronavirus tests on October 2 and will leave for Oman the next day. We will begin our training after completing one day quarantine in the hotel," added Debashish.

Meanwhile, according to the ICC's regulations, all the teams will have to stay for a mandatory six-day quarantine before the Super 12 stage in the UAE.

Bangladesh will travel to Dubai on October 21 after completing the qualifier stage. And if the Tigers require

to follow ICC's mandatory six-day quarantine rule upon arrival in the UAE, then Bangladesh could even miss their first Super 12 match scheduled on October 25.

Even if ICC sticks to its quarantine protocol, the BCB, however, has planned for an alternative way that will see the Tigers stay in bio-bubble in Oman and travel to Dubai via private transportation.

Bangladesh will start their training camp on October 5 in Oman. The Tigers will then travel to Dubai to take part in two official practice games on October 12 and 14 respectively.

Mahmudullah Riyad and his troop will then return to Oman to participate in the qualifier stage and will face Scotland in the first qualifier game on October 17.



IM Sankalp Gupta outshines GMs

SPORTS REPORTER



Indian International Master (IM) Sankalp Gupta grabbed the title of Joytu Sheikh Hasina International Grand Masters Chess Tournament at the close of ninth round game at Aarokanon Ballroom of Hotel 71 in Paltan yesterday.

Sankalp played a draw against compatriot IM Aronyak Ghosh to secure seven points, the highest, from nine matches of the tournament which also saw three more IMs grab the next top-three spots, ahead of nine Grand Masters (GM) of the tournament.

Three IMs - Mitrabha Guha, Aronyak Ghosh and Sayantan Das and two GMs - Ziaur Rahman and Masoud Musadeghpour - secured equal 6.5 points from nine matches and their position was decided by tiebreaker in which IM Mitrabha, who was sharing the lead with Sankalp after the penultimate round, finished second despite a loss to Iranian GM Masoud in the last match.

IM Aronyak Ghosh and IM Sayantan Das, who beat compatriot IM Srijit Paul, became third and fourth.

GM Ziaur Rahman beat Indian Sanket Chakravarty to finish fifth followed by GM Masoud, who became sixth with 6.5 points.

GM Enamul Hossain Razib became 16th with 5.5 points after a draw with IM Koustav Chatterjee while FM Sheikh Nasir Ahmed finished 22nd with five points.

A total of 62 players including nine GMs and 14 IMs took part in the tournament, sponsored by Canadian University, Bangladesh.



Pedro became only the third player to score for both teams in the Rome Derby when he doubled Lazio's lead against former club AS Roma on Sunday. Lazio beat Roma 3-2, ending their four-match winless run in Serie A and Pedro decided to celebrate the occasion with an eagle on his hand.

PHOTO: REUTERS

NEWS IN BRIEF



'Magical moment' as Hamilton hits 100 wins

Lewis Hamilton described becoming the first driver to win 100 Formula One races as "magical" on Sunday while his Mercedes team boss Toto Wolff hailed the landmark as "mind-blowing". The 36-year-old Briton reached his century by winning the rain-lashed Russian Grand Prix at Sochi. Seven-time world champion Hamilton also moved back to the top of the drivers standings by two points from Max Verstappen, who finished second in a Red Bull. "It's a magical moment," said Hamilton. Hamilton won his first F1 race in Canada in 2007 as a 22-year-old and behind the wheel of a McLaren. He was also the sport's first black race winner. His 99th victory came on home ground at Silverstone in July this year but it was achieved in controversial circumstances.

Moeen announces retirement from Tests

England all-rounder Moeen Ali has announced his retirement from test cricket, the country's cricket board said on Monday. Moeen, who made his test debut in 2014, scored 2,914 runs in 64 Tests at an average of 28.29 and picked up 195 wickets with his off-spin. "I've enjoyed test cricket but that intensity can be too much sometimes and I feel like I've done enough of it and I'm happy and content with how I've done," Moeen said. Having played little test cricket since the 2019 Ashes, Moeen was recalled for the home summer series against India and played in three matches.

Team Europe win fourth consecutive Laver Cup

Andrey Rublev and Alexander Zverev clinched the Laver Cup for Team Europe with a 6-2, 6-7(4), 10-3 win over Team World's Reilly Opelka and Denis Shapovalov on Sunday in Boston. Team Europe entered the final day of the event needing one victory from any of the four scheduled matches to secure the win and wasted no time as they picked it up in the lead encounter for an insurmountable 14-1 lead.